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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Opening Day: Fragmented Sports Market Confuses Baseball Fans

Baseball is back as Opening Day celebrations take place at ballparks across **MLB**. While some fans will be buying peanuts and cracker jacks at the games, others will be tuning in from home. From their couches, they're all asking the age-old question: "Where can I watch the game?"

"One day before MLB opening day and no TV deals have been announced for Padres, Diamondbacks or Rockies other than \$19.99/month and \$99.99/year in market streaming deals. I thought all these local OTA stations were going to come in and save the day?" former **Fox Sports Networks** President **Bob Thompson** [tweeted](#) Wednesday.

A number of updates came overnight to solidify the distribution of those teams' games, but at its heart, his comment hit on the idea that in 2023, MLB saw the tumultuous RSN space hit its apex.

The Diamondbacks and Padres waited until Opening Day to unveil cable and satellite distribution partners, with the Padres being available to **DirecTV**, **AT&T U-verse**, **Cox**, **Charter** and **Fubo** subscribers. The D-Backs have the same carriage agreements, but swap AT&T U-verse with **Comcast**. **MLB**, which stepped in to handle the production and distribution of the Padres' and Diamondbacks' games last May and July, will continue to do so for both teams, offering direct-to-consumer services Padres.TV and DBACKS.TV for respective fans. Each platform goes for \$19.99/month or \$99.99/year (\$39.99/

month or \$199.99/year if bundled with **MLB.TV**).

At the heart of the last-minute change-ups is **Diamond Sports Group** entering Chapter 11 bankruptcy last March. A tentative resolution earlier this year saw **Amazon** come in as a minority investor post-bankruptcy. Once Diamond Sports officially emerges, Amazon will enter into a commercial agreement with the company to offer games carried on Diamond's RSNs on **Prime Video**. That doesn't mean everything is hunky-dory. DSG and **Bally Sports** had 14 teams' broadcast rights pre-bankruptcy, and throughout the process **Bally Sports San Diego** lost the Padres and **Bally Sports Arizona** dropped the Diamondbacks before ultimately shutting down after the Coyotes moved its games to another network.

The remaining 12 teams—Braves, Reds, Guardians, Tigers, Royals, Angels, Marlins, Brewers, Twins, Cards, Rays and Rangers—will remain on Bally Sports RSNs through the 2024 season after DSG struck an agreement with MLB. DSG also made deals with the **NBA** and **NHL** to keep broadcasting games at least through their 2023-24 seasons, which both end in June.

What happens when the 2024 baseball season concludes remains to be seen, but it'll at least give those dozen teams the ability to take their rights elsewhere from the Bally Sports umbrella. That'll then determine what DSG can do, which could include consolidating networks for the teams that choose to remain with Bally Sports.

Elsewhere—particularly in Pittsburgh, Houston, Seattle and Colorado—it'll be the first season since **Warner Bros.**

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Discovery exited the RSN space. AT&T SportsNet Pittsburgh dropped the AT&T moniker and is now owned by the Pirates and Penguins. AT&T SportsNet Southwest re-launched as a jv from the Astros and Rockets called Space City Home Network. The Mariners took control of Root Sports in December, which also has the rights to the Kraken, Trail Blazers and non-nationally televised Gonzaga men's basketball games.

That leaves the Colorado Rockies. AT&T Sports Rocky Mountain shut down at the end of 2023, temporarily leaving the Rockies without a home. But in the early hours of Thursday, the team unveiled Rockies.TV, which runs at the same price as the Padres' and D-Backs' products and is available on cable through DirecTV, Comcast, Charter and Fubo. In DirecTV's case, it launched a Colorado Rockies channel on its lineup Thursday and renewed similar team channels for the Padres and Diamondbacks. They're included to subscribers with the Choice package or higher.

Fubo has been setting itself apart as a destination for hard-to-find RSNs. It announced a multi-year agreement Thursday with YES Network that make games from the Yankees and the Brooklyn Nets available immediately to subscribers. The announcement follows the agreement it struck with MASN earlier this month, making it the only distributor outside of Comcast to offer local access to Washington Nationals and Baltimore Orioles games.

The Orioles officially got a new controlling owner Wednesday when the MLB owners approved Dave Rubenstein after a vote, and he's dedicated to finding a solution to the long-running MASN dispute between ownership of the Orioles and the Nationals over the proper revenue split of proceeds from the

cable net.

"I think all of baseball, and all the fans of Baltimore and Washington, would like to see this resolved in a friendly, amicable way in the near future," Rubenstein told the Washington Post. "And that's my goal."

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LET'S NOT MAKE A DEAL

S&P's TMT deal tracker reports that media and telecom M&A plunged to a 13-month low in February, with North American media and telecom companies striking 96 transactions worth nearly \$160 million in aggregate transaction value. It's the sector's weakest showing in M&A since January 2023 (142 deals with aggregate value of \$65.7 million), according to S&P Global Market Intelligence data. The largest deal was BuzzFeed Media completing the sale of its Complex Networks business to e-commerce company Commerce Media Holdings for \$114.3 million. Five of the month's top 10 deals involved radio stations.

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VP HARRIS INTRODUCES FEDERAL POLICY AROUND AI TOOLS

In a continuation of what is a major week of conversation on Capitol Hill around artificial intelligence, VP Kamala Harris unveiled the first government-wide policy regarding the use of AI tools by federal agencies. By Dec. 1, federal agencies must have implemented safeguards to be applied when using AI in a way that could impact Americans' rights or safety. Those will apply to a wide range of AI applications,

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and should an agency not apply those protections, it must immediately cease using the AI system unless leadership can justify why it is not moving forward with that safety net. The policy also requires federal agencies to release expanded annual inventories of their AI use cases, among other things, to increase transparency regarding the use of the technology. At the same time, the Administration hopes to push innovation and grow the workforce around artificial intelligence. By this summer, the Administration will hire 100 AI professionals to promote the safe use of AI and a career fair for AI roles across the government will be held on April 18. The guidance also encourages agencies to responsibly experiment with generative AI with guardrails.

to learn more about the product. Google Fiber recently started construction in Bellevue and Council Bluffs as well and is working to connect more of the city as quickly as possible.

DRAX GETS FIRST EXPANSION

Disney is expanding its Real-Time Ad Exchange product DRAX after creating a direct pathway to advertiser demand with the media buying platforms Display & Video 360 (made by Google) and The Trade Desk. DRAX Direct streamlines access to inventory across Hulu and Disney+ for advertisers. It combines Disney’s proprietary technology stack with the two buy-side platforms, which allows for a simplified way for addressable buying across Disney’s streaming portfolio.

EVERCORE ADJUSTS PARAMOUNT

Evercore ISI modestly increased its expectation for Paramount’s 1Q24E adjusted OIBDA to +4% on better profitability contribution from the Super Bowl than previously expected. But it’s lowering estimates for the remainder of 2024E on weaker affiliate trends and linear advertising. Evercore upped its estimate for Paramount+ adds to 2.5 million from 2 million, citing Antenna research data that estimated that 3.4 million signed up for the Super Bowl. It’s not clear how many of those new subs will stick around, thus the full year estimate of 5 million adds remains the same.

PROGRAMMING

AMC will debut new Giancarlo Esposito series “Parish” without commercial interruption this Sunday at 10:15 p.m., rolling right out of the finale of “The Walking Dead: The Ones Who Live.” Crown Royal is the presenting sponsor of the premiere, which will be followed by a special sneak peek at the upcoming second season of “The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon, The Book of Carol.” – There’s plenty of WWE on A&E this spring, with Gabriel “Fluffy” Iglesias joining the roundtable discussion of WWE superstars in all-new episodes of “WWE Rivals” (premiering April 21) and all-new season of memorabilia series “WWE’s Most Wanted Treasures” (debuts April 14). Not enough? Check out the new season of “Biography: WWE Legends” (premieres May 26) for deep dives into the careers of Ricky Steamboat, the Steiner Brothers, Trish Stratus and more. – FX shifted the premiere of “Welcome to Wrexham” to May 2 at 10pm (streaming the next day on Hulu). It was originally scheduled for an April 18 release. The premiere will include the first two episodes of the eight-episode season, with a new episode available each following Thursday. – Peacock will exclusively stream live coverage of Sunday’s BOXXER card. It all kicks off at 1pm ET with a 12-round bout between heavyweight rivals Fabio Wardley and Frazer Clarke.

VERIZON COMMITS FURTHER TO GOING GREEN

Verizon joined RE100, a global initiative aiming to get the world’s top businesses to commit to 100% renewable energy. It also wants to accelerate change towards zero carbon grids at scale. Verizon has already committed to sourcing renewable energy that equates to 100% of its annual electricity usage by 2030. It has also set an interim goal of 50% by 2025.

ROKU PARTNERS TO SUPPORT DEI IN BELOW-THE-LINE WORK

Roku Originals is teaming up with The Handy Foundation to provide opportunities in the film and entertainment industry to underrepresented communities, particularly for below-the-line jobs. That includes assistant editors, production coordinators, production audio and makeup artists. Apprenticeships have already been provided on series like “Honest Renovations” and “Meet Me in Rome.”

ON THE CIRCUIT

NAB will host its fourth Diversity Symposium at the NAB Show in Vegas, April 14-15. It’s expanding the program to a broader swath of the media, technology and entertainment industries. Speakers include Joe Strechay, TV and film producer and blindness consultant on Apple TV+ series “See,” and Cassandra Freeman, who is known for her role as Aunt Viv in Peacock’s “Bel Air” and is also the co-founder of Creatricity, a platform that simplifies the process of finding and hiring vetted, reliable, and diverse talent and crew for television and film projects.

FIBER FRENZY

Some Omaha residents can now sign up for service from Google Fiber. The operator is starting in the Aksarben neighborhood, offering plans of 1 Gig, 2 Gig, 5 Gig or 8 Gig. On Wednesday, the company celebrated with BBQ, partnering with local resident Oklahoma Joe’s to offer free lunch to customers who came out

EDITOR’S NOTE

Cablefax Daily will not publish Friday. The next issue of Cablefax Daily will hit your inbox on Monday, April 1.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

The Truth Always Prevails in HBO's Alex Jones doc

In an era where misinformation and conspiracies run rampant, there are few court cases that epitomize those dangers more than *Alex Jones* and the multiple lawsuits he faced regarding the claims he made about the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. "The Truth vs. Alex Jones" (premiered Tuesday on **HBO** and is available to stream on **Max**) is a harrowing look into how Jones' claims that the shooting was a hoax on his show "InfoWars" affected the families of victims. The doc introduces Jones, who began his career on public-access cable in Austin, before recounting the events of Dec. 14, 2012. Jones' rise to prominence was aided by his propensity to lean into conspiracy theories no matter how ridiculous. "Alex eventually stood out as he got thicker skin," said *Russell Dowden*, a radio host in Austin. "His ability to capture that audience, it's impressive. You watched because you didn't know what the guy was going to say next. You didn't know." With interviews and testimonials from parents of the victims, the doc already carries a great amount of emotion, but when it intertwines that emotion with Jones' claims of the tragedy being a hoax, it encapsulates just how big the impact was for parents. Multiple parents detail their experiences of the events and how they started to receive threats from Jones' viewers. The interviews alone are moving, but HBO's combination of those interviews with clips of Jones set the stage for the parents to fight back. "I was accused of being part of a government conspiracy. None of it is true. All I did was lose my son," said *Neil Heslin*, who was one of the several parents who said enough is enough and filed a defamation suit against Jones. As of November, the Sandy Hook families won nearly \$1.5 billion in legal judgments, but are offering to settle for at least \$85 million over 10 years. – *Noah Ziegler*

REVIEWS

"Constellation," streaming, **Apple TV+**. While this week's review subjects seem wildly different, they share themes. The new mystery/thriller/sci-fi series "Constellation" centers on Jo (the terrific *Noomi Rapace*), a wife, mother and Swedish astronaut on the International Space Station. After an emergency at the station Jo experiences strange encounters. Meanwhile, former astronaut Henry (a leonine *Jonathan Banks*) has a pet project aboard the Station, a quantum physics experiment. In a terrific scene, Henry explains quantum physics' basics to Jo's young child Alice and us (unless you aced HS science). Henry says his experiment shows one particle can exist in two places simultaneously or in a liminal area, between 2 worlds. This belief, which some IRL astronauts swear by, is a recurring theme in *Sean Jablonski* and *Peter Harness's* inventive plotline. Perhaps that's why Jo thinks she never returned home; yes, she looks the same but too many things are different after her return from space. Indeed, little Alice (*Rosie and Davina Coleman*) agrees. Realists may dislike this plot, but they'll enjoy Constellation's seriousness. For example, most space-related elements are accurate, including the politics. – "Anatomy of a Fall," streaming, **Hulu**, **Apple TV+**. While this 5-time Academy Award-nominated film (1 win) is solidly Earth-based, it, like "Constellation," centers on a mother-young child relationship. Moreover, its courtroom scenes emphasize interpretation, not different worlds, but differing viewpoints. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (03/18/24-03/24/24)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.593	1869
TBSC	0.500	1577
MSNBC	0.389	1227
TNT	0.378	1191
TRUTV	0.348	1097
ESPN	0.269	850
HGTV	0.247	780
HIST	0.222	699
HALL	0.203	641
INSP	0.194	612
CNN	0.182	572
FOOD	0.172	541
USA	0.159	502
TLC	0.149	470
DISC	0.146	461
TVLAND	0.145	457
ID	0.135	425
GSN	0.114	361
AMC	0.110	347
REELZ	0.109	342
FX	0.106	336
A&E	0.102	323
BRAVO	0.101	320
WETV	0.095	299
OXY	0.090	283
HMM	0.089	281
NWSMX	0.079	250
ADSM	0.076	241
LIFE	0.074	234
NATGEO	0.069	219
SYFY	0.069	217
ESPN2	0.069	216
COM	0.068	215
NAN	0.068	213
TRAVEL	0.067	212

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



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